



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending June 21, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

HOUSE PASSES SAFETY ENHANCEMENT FOR SMALL AIRPORTS

The Small Airport Safety, Security, and Air Service Improvement Act passed by the U.S. House of Representatives this week includes an amendment I introduced that would pave the way to allowing more flexibility in funding the operation of air traffic control towers at small airports.

When planning to build an air traffic control tower, the operational costs from year to year must be factored in. I wanted to make sure that we at least quantify the need small airports face in meeting the local share of operational costs not covered by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), so that we can keep and encourage one of the best air safety measures we have.

My amendment, which passed 415-12, directs the Department of Transportation to conduct a feasibility study and cost-benefit analysis on allowing airports to use up to 10 percent of their Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants funds to pay the non-Federal share of the cost of operation of a control tower. The study is due in one year.

The study would lay the groundwork for a provision to allow airports the flexibility to spend federal money designed for safety improvements on control tower operation costs. These funds are part of an existing program.

The Walla Walla Regional Airport would benefit from this type of provision. The airport pays approximately \$41,000 annually (16 percent of the total cost) to operate its tower. If the airport was allowed to use 10 percent of its annual AIP allocation, it would be able to spend up to \$100,000 on operating costs.

WALLA WALLA AIRPORT TO RECEIVE \$1 MILLION MORE FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Walla Walla Regional Airport will receive an additional \$1 million for security enhancements. This is great news for the Walla Walla Regional Airport. These improvements will greatly improve the safety and quality of aviation service for passengers in our region. Improved transportation infrastructure is critical to economic

development in this region, and this funding is another step toward bringing more business to the Walla Walla region.

The total amount awarded to date by the federal government for enhancing the airport is \$4.34 million. The funding will go toward improving runway safety, grooving the runway, rehabilitating runway lighting, constructing a service road, and other security enhancements.

LEGISLATION

This week I signed a letter to Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service and General Government, Rep. Ernest Istook, expressing support for a measure that would prohibit the public disclosure of firearms tracing data. Releasing this data, which is critical to law enforcement investigations, could jeopardize those very investigations and compromise the safety of law enforcement agents.

This week I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 2373**, the Abolishment of Obsolete Agencies and Federal Sunset Act of 2001, introduced by Rep Kevin Brady of Texas.

This legislation would establish a commission that would review at least every 12 years whether federal agencies should be eliminated or reorganized. It would also review public need for each agency and report to Congress on all legislation introduced that would establish a new agency or a new program to be carried out by an existing agency. If the Commission recommends abolition of an agency, it must be abolished within one year.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

H.R. 1979, Small Airport Safety, Security, and Air Service Improvement Act of 2002. The bill passed by a vote of 284-143. I voted yes.

H.R. 1979 allows a small airport to use its Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grant money to build or equip an air traffic control tower that will be operated under the FAA's contract tower program. New tower construction and equipment purchases will be eligible for funding using AIP entitlements and the AIP State apportionment. Reimbursement for past construction or equipment purchases will be available only from an airport's AIP entitlement. In order to be eligible for this funding, airports will have to qualify for the contract tower program and pay a 10 percent local share. The bill also allows the FAA to contract with a private company to both build and operate the tower.

This legislation will be a tremendous help to smaller airports. Many smaller airports lack an air traffic control tower and as a result, passengers and pilots do not benefit from the safety enhancements provided by air traffic controllers. With this bill, we took a step toward making sure passengers and pilots in small cities will be just as safe as in large cities.

H.R. 4931, Retirement Savings Security Act of 2002. The bill passed by a vote of --- to --. I voted yes.

This legislation makes permanent the pension and individual retirement contribution provisions of the tax relief package passed by the Congress last year. Without this legislation, the amount people would be allowed to contribute to their retirement savings accounts would decrease in 2011. These provisions are scheduled to expire at the end of 2010 because of a "sunset" provision that was included in the law to comply with arcane procedural rules in the Senate. H.R. 4931 makes the following provisions from last year's law permanent:

- **Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs):** The current-law \$2,000 IRA contribution limit (established in 1981) for both traditional and Roth IRAs will be increased to \$5,000 by 2008 and indexed for inflation thereafter;
- **Increased Contributions to 401(k) Plans and Other Pensions:** The limit on individual contributions to 401(k)-type plans will be increased to \$15,000 by 2006; and the limit on an employer's deduction for contributions to certain types of defined contribution plans will be raised to 25 percent of compensation;
- **Catch-up Contributions:** Additional "catch-up" contributions for workers age 50 and above will be permitted for 401(k)-type plans and IRAs;
- **Faster Vesting and Pension Portability:** The vesting requirements for employer matching contributions will be reduced from five to three years. Additionally, pensions will be made portable so workers can more easily roll over retirement plan assets when they change jobs; and
- **Regulatory Relief to Encourage Small Business Pension Growth:** Pension laws will be modernized and streamlined to encourage small businesses to offer pension plans.

H.Res. 449, Establishing a Select Committee on Homeland Security. The resolution passed by a voice vote. I voted yes.

The resolution established a nine-member committee appointed by the Speaker of the House to make recommendations on the formation of a Department of Homeland Security.

SCHEDULE

I met with Kim Field from the Washington State Department of Health regarding tuberculosis control issues. Members of Washington RESULTS Group, including Bob

Dickerson, Erika Kroll, Stacy Carkonen, Charles Guest, Sharon Henley, Stan Merrell, Alan Newbert, Carolyn Prouty, Lesley Reed, and Dr. Rich Renner, met with me regarding infectious diseases.

This year's busy appropriation season got started with a review of defense spending in the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, of which I am vice chair.

I spoke to members of the Casualty and Property Group of Washington. I welcomed Caroline Tripp, a high school student from Spokane, who is serving as a page in the House of Representatives here. I met with Rick Rutkowski of Microvision. I had lunch with actor Kevin Kline who was on Capitol Hill to lobby for funding to fight juvenile diabetes.

Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth met with me at my office regarding Box Canyon Dam re-licensing issues. I met with Tom Karier of the Northwest Power Planning Council to discuss the current Northwest energy situation. I met with local carpenters Roger Johanson and Tom Flynn of Spokane, and Gerry Young regarding transportation issues. I met with Walt and Judy Havenstein, whose child has juvenile diabetes. I met with Kathleen Siedlecki of Walla Walla General Hospital, a member of the Adventist Healthcare Coalition, regarding Medicare/Medicaid changes. I met with Tom Kiernan, president of the National Parks Conservation Association regarding parks funding. I met with Bernard Daines of World Wide Packets.

I spoke at a weekly prayer breakfast for congressional members. I participated in a Cuba Working Group meeting about how to implement our policy review released earlier this year. I met with King County Sheriff Dave Reichert regarding the Green River investigation. Former WSU professor Leon Radziemski and his two sons met with me at my office. Bill Talmadge of King & Spalding, Sara Lilygren of the American Meat Institute, Kirk Ferrel of the National Pork Producer's Council met with me regarding agriculture funding. Jeff Lesser of Shadle Park High School was in town for the National Youth Leaders Conference and met with me at my office. Jack McKinnon, who was in town for the 2002 Congressional Student Leadership Conference, also met with me.

I met with Kathleen Taft of Spokane from Americans for Democratic Action to discuss the minimum wage, Social Security, welfare reform, gun control, military spending, trade and education.

I look forward to meetings in Spokane, Colville, Omak and Walla Walla this weekend.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

Spokane Office

920 W. Riverside, Suite 594
Spokane, WA 99201
509-353-2374
Fax: 509-353-2412

Spokane Valley Office

9209 E. Mission Avenue, Suite C
Spokane, WA 99206
509-924-7775
Fax: 509-924-7671

Colville Office

555 S. Main Street
Colville, WA 99114
509-684-3481
Fax: 509-684-3482

Walla Walla Office

29 S. Palouse Street
Walla Walla, WA 99362
509-529-9358
Fax: 509-529-9379

Washington, D.C. Office

223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-224-2006
Fax: 202-225-3392

Website

www.house.gov/nethercutt

Electronic Mail

www.house.gov/nethercutt/contact